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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0478
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2630
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2512
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 0142
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000834

SIPDIS

FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2028

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: MP TERESA KOK RELEASED AFTER ONE WEEK OF ISA
INCARCERATION

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 833

[1](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 810

[1](#)C. KUALA LUMPUR 806

[1](#)D. KUALA LUMPUR 805

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark for reasons 1.4 (b
and d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Malaysian police unexpectedly released Democratic Action Party (DAP) MP Teresa Kok on September 19, one week after she was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Upon release, Kok immediately held a press conference in which she explained the accusations over which she was detained were both untrue and had nothing to do with national security. Kok told us she believes that the arrest order came from either Prime Minister Abdullah or Home Minister Syed Hamid to distract attention from earlier racist statements made by an UMNO MP. The president of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the leading Chinese partner in PM Abdullah's governing coalition, reportedly weighed in hard with Abdullah in order to gain the earlier release of ISA detainee Tan Hoong Chen, according to an MCA source. Local and international media carried the September 18 statement by the Department Spokesman expressing grave concerns over the Malaysian Government's recent use of the ISA.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Kok's release may relieve some of the immediate criticism leveled at PM Abdullah and his government over the most recent ISA arrests, although six persons remain in ISA detention for political rather than security reasons: blogger Raja Petra and five ethnic Indians activists arrested in December 2007. Despite Kok's release, public comments associating the political opposition with national security threats made by PM Abdullah, Home Minister Syed Hamid and senior police officials indicate that the potential for future ISA arrests cannot be dismissed. End Summary and Comment.

SECOND ISA RELEASE

[1](#)3. (SBU) Police released DAP MP Teresa Kok after detaining her for seven days under the ISA. The police claimed they detained Kok for violating Section 73(1) of the ISA for inciting religious tension and conflict. The ISA allows for an indefinite detention without formal charges or a trial, and was originally designed to be applied to people who threatened national security. Police previously released

newspaper reporter Tan Hoong Chen after immediate, considerable pressure from the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), UMNO's largest coalition partner in the National Front (BN). Raja Petra remains incarcerated.

TERESA KOK SPEAKS OUT

¶4. (SBU) At a press conference that immediately followed her release, Kok said the police justified their detention under the ISA based on three accusations: that she led a petition to oppose an early morning call to prayer at a mosque in her constituency; that she stated that 30 percent of the Selangor Islamic Department (JAIS) allocation should be given to non-Islam religious bodies; and that she opposed using Jawi wording (Malay words using the Arabic alphabet) on road signs in Kuala Lumpur. As Kok pointed out in her press conference "the three issues have nothing to do with national security."

Even so, Kok flatly denied the first two accusations, which surfaced when a pro-UMNO newspaper, Utusan Malaysia, published an unverified story claiming Kok made these requests. Three days after the story broke--and four days before her ISA arrest--the Imam of the mosque in question publicly denied that Kok had done anything mentioned in the article. Kok confirmed that she opposed the changing of the signs because the local resident associations were unhappy with the new signs, believing they were a waste of money.

KOK'S THEORY ON WHY SHE WAS ARRESTED

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¶5. (C) Kok said at her press conference that when she asked the police who ordered her detention, they replied "from the top", but they did not specify further. Kok told us she believes that the order came from either Prime Minister Abdullah or Syed Hamid, and was an attempt to move past the racist statements made by UMNO MP Ahmad Ismail in Penang (ref C). Our MCA contact (below) provided an additional theory: police are still very angry about an incident of police misconduct in 2005, which was exposed by Teresa Kok.

A RED LINE CROSSED, WITH THE PM IN THE DARK?

¶6. (C) The head of MCA's think-tank Fui K. Soong (protect) informed Poloff that after Tan's arrest, MCA President Ong Ka Ting immediately contacted Deputy Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, who told Ong that he was not aware of the detention. Ong also got in touch with Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, who claimed he was also in the dark. Describing the situation as "frightening" when the top two leaders are not aware of the ISA detention, our contact stated that MCA President Ong told Abdullah and Najib that he will not be able to control the anger at the Chinese grassroots over this detention. Ong reportedly issued an ultimatum: release Tan or the MCA may consider withdrawing from the BN coalition. Our contact claims that this was the reason why Tan was released after less than one day. Another contact from Gerakan, UMNO's other predominantly ethnic-Chinese party, also believes that Abdullah and Najib had nothing to do with the initial detentions, and that the mastermind was Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar. Syed Hamid is known to take action without checking with the PM or DPM, our Gerakan contact alleged.

KEITH